



"There is something rotten in the state of Russia."

Through events that would make good theater if only they weren't so painfully real, we have seen the once-vaunted Red Army become its own worst enemy. The scene is the embattled and horribly scarred Chechen Republic. The protagonists and antagonists are — well, who really knows? The players are the soldiers of the Russian Army, troops from the Interior Ministry, and the Chechen natives who are outnumbered, out-gunned, and largely without external support.

Through the heavy door of censorship, we saw or heard tales of terrific gun battles and bombardments where the rebels consistently outmaneuvered and outshot a bigger and ostensibly better-organized foe.

What happened to the once respected Red Army which stood tall on the West German and Czechoslovakian border for so long? What happened to the army that learned its bitter lessons in the Afghan mountains? Why are armored and mechanized units making such basic mistakes as running into cities without scouts ahead?

Some say that we are finally seeing the real Russian Army which past propaganda — ours and theirs — built into a force more capable on paper than on the ground. Others say it is the logical by-product of a corrupt communitistic society that is imploding like a star reaching critical mass. Those answers are too easy. I think the reasons are more understandable.

Like the Russians, we were faced with the monumental task of downsizing at the end of the cold war. Our nation's health demanded we reorganize, consolidate on the objective, and prepare for new missions. We did that, but thankfully our civilian and military leaders drew us down in as controlled a manner as possible.

What lessons should we learn from the Russian Army's Chechen humiliation? First, an army must learn from its mistakes and not repeat them. The Russians are relearning what they had already learned in Afghanistan: a dedicated home team has a tremendous battlefield advantage.

Second, that military measures only work in the long haul if the political directions guiding them are clearly understood. Recall the tragedy of errors in the relationship between Russian security chief Alexander Lebed and the on-

site field commander. Negotiations with the opposition don't work well when the politician is saying peace is at hand and the general is already beginning another armored assault.

Third, we must never abandon the tactics, techniques, and procedures we've worked so hard to develop. Adapt them, yes, but reject outright, never.

Finally, we should never be so smug that we think our great army is immutable.

The army we have today is not the same army we will have in 2001, nor is it the same army we had in 1991, or 1972, or 1945. Those dates mark important times in our history, but they are only a part of what we are today. Yes, our core values remain constant. Doctrine is much the same. Leadership competencies are constant, but the skill and competency of individual soldiers, their units, and the larger units they comprise, is changeable. You want proof? Go around the staff table in a tank battalion, or walk down the motor pool line in a cavalry squadron, and find out how many of the soldiers and leaders are combat veterans in that unit, or in any unit at all. The numbers will be small, and this only five years removed from Desert Storm.

As we seem to be near the last step in downsizing, there are some other things to learn from the Russian experience. When funding cuts are the order of the day, when training opportunities decrease rapidly due to resource constraints, when leaders and soldiers alike feel alienated from the population whose bidding they are supposed to be executing, and when manning levels sink to levels that give too many junior guys too much responsibility too quickly, something very bad happens. In the business of warfighting, the first time your delusions of grandeur are exposed is when an enemy pops you between the eyes. That is much too late.

Is there any solace for us? Yes. As the Army's Chief of Staff, General Reimer, recently said, we are in good shape. I believe him. You should, too. We withstood a historical downsizing and emerged on the other end of it a leaner, meaner, and even more ready force than before. Feel good about it, because it sure didn't have to turn out that way. Look at our once able foe to see how fast and how far one can sink without a well-executed plan. Driver, move out. Gunner, continue to scan.

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